

## One-Armed Bandits and Other Stories of Iowa's Past and Present

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*One-Armed Bandits and Other Stories of Iowa's Past and Present*, by George Mills. Ames: Focus Books, 1997. xvii, 279 pp. Illustrations, map, index. \$14.00 paper.

REVIEWED BY RICHARD BROADIE, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

In *One-Armed Bandits and Other Stories of Iowa's Past and Present*, longtime Des Moines journalist George Mills digs deeply into his reporter's notes to produce his seventh book of Iowa history and folklore. Mills, now past his ninety-first birthday, remains active, occasionally contributing an original piece to the *Des Moines Register*. And he can still be seen at big events like candidates' debates, looking like he's seen it all before—as he probably has.

*One-Armed Bandits* is a collection of essays, some new and some that are reprints of articles that have appeared in the *Register*. They are written in a journalistic style that should appeal to a wide range of Iowa history buffs. Mills does not footnote his essays, but provides a list of sources at the beginning of the book. Most of the book is derived from the author's own reporting going back to 1928—nearly half of the state's existence, if one cares to do the math.

The two most important essays in Mills's book are his first and last. In "One-Armed Bandits," he looks at both legal and illegal gambling in Iowa since the turn of the century. While leaving the impression that he has major reservations about the current "gaming industry," Mills is fair to both sides, outlining both the economic benefits and social costs of legalized gambling. In any debate regarding a public policy issue, it is important to know the facts. Mills's essay, regardless of one's point of view, is a good place to go to find them.

The final essay, "The Cow War," a discussion of southeastern Iowa farmers' resistance to mandatory bovine tuberculosis testing in the 1930s, was of particular interest to this reviewer. Indeed, this piece will be added to my collection of articles on farm radicalism during the depression era, a topic on which Mills appears to have considerable expertise.

Much of the remainder of this book is devoted to what might be called articles of human interest. They may be of limited interest to professional historians but should hold the attention of those who like a good story about long-forgotten people and events in Iowa's past. I particularly enjoyed being reminded of the northwestern Iowa football coach who, for about a week in 1970, was able to pass himself off as a return specialist for the Miami Dolphins. I have tried to

recall this story on many occasions, but had forgotten most of the details until being reminded of them in this volume.

One of Mills's great strengths as a reporter—his evenhandedness—brings me to my only criticism of this book. He tells a great story but reaches few conclusions. Before the century comes to a close, it would be fun to see Mills take off the gloves and tell us what he really thinks about some of the people and issues he has covered. How does he assess the politicians of his era? Is the state and nation on the right track? And what about the decline of the *Des Moines Register* as Iowa's newspaper? Now that would be a fun volume, indeed.

*Bust to Boom: Documentary Photographs of Kansas, 1936–1949*, edited by Constance B. Schulz, with text commentary by Donald Worster. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996. ix, 168 pp. 94 photographs, bibliographical essay. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY PAMELA RINEY-KEHRBERG, ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

*Bust to Boom* brings together nearly one hundred photographs of Kansas in the 1930s and 1940s. The photos, taken for the Farm Security Administration, Office of War Information, and Standard Oil, follow the state from the depths of the Dust Bowl and Great Depression to the economic development that came during the Second World War. The common thread holding this collection together is that Roy Stryker, who worked as the head of the Historical Section of the Resettlement Administration (later the Farm Security Administration) during Franklin Roosevelt's administration, organized each of the three projects. A number of photographers' work is represented in the volume, including that of Arthur Rothstein, John Vachon, Russell Lee, and others. They captured a variety of scenes, from windswept and dust-ravaged farms, fields, and towns to county fairs and a diverse group of those who labored in Kansas during this era. Many of these photographs have never before been published.

Several different types of text accompany the photos. Donald Worster provides the introductory essay, which sets the scene for the pictorial collection. He follows the history of Kansas through the Dust Bowl years into the prosperity of World War II, and places Kansas's experience in the context of larger national trends. The editor introduces the larger photographic collection, as well as each of the photographers. A detailed historiographical essay concludes the volume. For the most part, this is highly satisfactory, giving readers enough

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